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ABSTRACT

This review of the status of English language instruction in Sabah, Malaysia, provides an overview of the role of English in the society in general and outlines the status of English use and instruction in both the Chinese and government educational systems at all levels. Topics covered are: the characteristics and training of English language instructors, the type and availability of instructional materials, educational administration and planning in relation to English teaching, English instruction outside the educational systems, British and other international support, commercial opportunities related to English instruction, the status of language research, and other sources of information. Although English, as the second official language, is still commonly used and is supported in principle in the government, English use and instruction are endangered by lack of prestige among students and common use in more isolated communities. (MSE)

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ENGLISH TEACHING PROFILE

Country: Sabah - Malaysia

Date: April 1986

1. ROLE AND STATUS OF ENGLISH

Between 1969 and 1979 a programme was undertaken to change the language of instruction in Malaysian schools from English to Bahasa Malaysia. The introduction of Bahasa Malaysia as the medium of instruction in all schools is part of Malaysian government policy to promote a national identity and national unity and has, naturally, resulted in a decline in English language teaching and learning. However, government policy which seeks to improve the economic position of the indigenous (Bumiputra) section of the population by, amongst other things, positive discrimination in educational opportunity and employment has led certain sections of the population (in particular the large Chinese minority) to seek educational opportunities for their children outside Malaysia, particularly in Britain. This trend places a premium on English language competence and is a factor in the increasing anxiety about falling standards of English language teaching in schools.

English is not used as a study language in Sabah except at the Kinabalu International School which is restricted to the children of expatriates. English is still used widely as a medium of communication in commercial circles, although the use of Bahasa Malaysia is increasing. English is also used socially between members of the upper middle classes. There are local English language newspapers, but these all now contain at least some news items in Bahasa Malaysia (and often in one of the other local languages also). Radio and television programmes produced locally are mainly in Bahasa Malaysia, as is the bulk of official government correspondence.

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2. ENGLISH WITHIN THE EDUCATION SYSTEM

In the fully government-assisted schools in Sabah, English is taught from Primary Class 1 upwards.

In Chinese schools, English is taught from Form III upwards

Year III	60 minutes per week
Year IV	90 minutes per week
Year V	90 minutes per week
Year VI	90 minutes per week

In Government schools the time allotted from July of Year I is

Year I	240 minutes per week
Year II	240 minutes per week
Year III	240 minutes per week
Year IV	210 minutes per week
Year V	210 minutes per week
Year VI	210 minutes per week

To enable the pupils from Chinese schools to catch up with students from Government schools there is a one-year bridge class between primary and secondary schools.

In all secondary schools the allocation is 300 minutes per week.

The principal public examinations by which English is examined are as follows:

Primary 5 Assessment	(Local)
Sijil Rendah Pelajaran (SRP) Form 3	(Local)
Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia (SPM) Form 5	(Local)
Sijil Tinggi Pelajaran (STP)	(Local/Cambridge)

A somewhat more communicatively orientated syllabus referred to as 322 is available in addition to the old 121 syllabus for the Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia. Students wishing to go overseas may take 119.

Universities in Malaysia require Malaysia-medium educated students to pass an English special paper in their first year.

The Curriculum Development Centre (CDC) Kuala Lumpur acts as a secretariat for formulating and reviewing all school syllabuses. Selection of textbooks is also centrally controlled by the Textbooks Bureau (TB) in Kuala Lumpur, although an element of choice is delegated to individual schools, in that they can choose from the lists prepared by the TB.

The Inspectorate of the Sabah Department of Education, which is federally controlled, has responsibility for the inspection of English language teaching. There is also a State Language Officer whose role includes in-service training of English language teachers.

There are no English for Specific Purposes courses in Sabah. Further education classes are held mainly for those who failed at SRP, SPM/MCE (Malaysia Certificate of Education) or HSC (Higher Certificate of Education)/STP levels, and these include study for the English language paper.

3. TEACHERS OF ENGLISH

British involvement with in-service training courses has been welcomed in the past and there are signs that increased involvement would be welcomed.

Initial training of teachers for primary and lower secondary English language courses is carried out at the four teacher training colleges in Sabah. Teachers for the upper secondary classes are theoretically supposed to be graduates, usually from one of the peninsular universities, but the shortage of English language teachers at all levels means that upper classes are often taught by poorly trained teachers. Indeed the only required qualification in secondary schools is that the teacher should speak English. In approximately one in five of the primary schools even this basic requirement is not fulfilled.

In-service courses are held regularly for primary and secondary school teachers. These courses are held in vacation time.

There is no English Language Teacher Association.

There are still about 140 schools (mainly primary) without any teachers of English.

4. MATERIALS SUPPORT

A wide variety of textbooks is in use. All books used must be selected from the federally approved list. There are several projects underway intended, more or less specifically, to help with English language teaching.

The English Language Reading Programme (ELRP), funded by the Ministry of Education, is an attempt 'to make available to the pupils books which are at the right level'. The pupils are tested, then placed in sets, and books of an appropriate level provided. Only certain schools are involved in this scheme as it is voluntary and requires some capital to be provided by the school.

Sabah English Language Modules (SELM), funded by the Sabah Foundation and the Education Department, '(the) aim of this project is to produce English language materials for pupils who study in schools where there are no English teachers. In concrete terms the objective is to produce taped materials for the learning of English which can be used by a teacher who can understand Bahasa Malaysia and pupils who can follow instructions in Bahasa Malaysia' - SELM, the Ministry of Education document.

Project InSPIRE, funded by the Sabah Foundation, is intended to provide supplementary materials in rural primary schools for all subjects including Bahasa Inggeris.

Multiple Classroom Project, funded by the van Leer Foundation, is aimed at helping the teachers in the small rural primary schools where frequently children from different classes are taught simultaneously.

Language Laboratories, some schools, thirteen secondary and two primary, have been provided with language laboratories by the Sabah Foundation. Certain difficulties are being met by these schools owing to lack of suitable materials and lack of support, maintenance, ancillary equipment and training.

KBSR Programme, a new primary school curriculum is being introduced which includes a new English language teaching syllabus. This was introduced into Primary I in January 1983, and has now (1986) reached Primary 4. The new Bahasa Inggeris syllabus is much more communicatively oriented than the previous largely structural one. To help with the introduction of this course a large amount of supporting material is being supplied to teachers. A major in-service course programme exists whereby teachers are introduced to the new syllabus and methodologies. Each year, as a further form is included in the programme, teachers teaching that form are called for a ten-day introductory course where all subjects in the curriculum are dealt with. Particularly for English, this programme faces some difficulties chiefly associated with the low level of training of teachers and lack of knowledge of basic English (see SELM above).

5. EDUCATIONAL ADMINISTRATION IN RELATION TO ENGLISH TEACHING

Education is federally controlled. Sabah, as all other states, has a Director of Education and Deputy Director of Education. Under these, and controlled by Heads of Division, are seven divisions (Finance and Administration, Development and Planning, Administration and Services, Schools, Training and Curriculum, Educational Media, Examinations). A further two divisions (Inspectorate and Registrar of Schools) are directly controlled by the irector and Deputy Director. Within the Training and Curriculum Division is a Language Section controlled by the State Language Officer. Within this section are three units, Bahasa Malaysia, Bahasa Cina and Bahasa Inggeris. These are directed respectively by their own officers. The Language Officer for English currently controls approximately three language supervisors whose job it is to organize various projects e.g. SELM (see below) as well as run various in-service courses for teachers. Additionally, in the five geographical Divisions of Sabah (not to be confused with the administrative divisions mentioned above) are Divisional Headquarters with staff whose task it is to advise and direct teachers in schools. Divisions are also sub-divided into districts with district officers and officers carrying out similar tasks.

6. DEVELOPMENT AND PLANNING OF THE TEACHING OF ENGLISH

The development and planning of the teaching of English is considered to be a federal matter and hence major decisions concerning this are determined in Kuala Lumpur, with implementation controlled by CDC (see above).

7. ENGLISH OUTSIDE THE EDUCATION SYSTEM

There is one commercial School of English in Sabah. There is also a Commercial College in Koto Kinabalu which offers some training in 'Commercial English' but this is of a very basic nature.

8. BRITISH SUPPORT FOR THE TEACHING OF ENGLISH

There is one post in Sabah under the Key English Language Teaching Scheme (English Language Teaching Adviser, Department of Education, Training and Curriculum Section, Bahasa Inggeris Unit). It is planned to establish two additional regional KELT posts by the end of 1986.

Two Voluntary Service Overseas (VSO) volunteers will assist the regional KELT officers in a programme intended to help rural primary school teachers.

9. AMERICAN SUPPORT FOR THE TEACHING OF ENGLISH

There is no American-funded ELT activity in Sabah.

10. OTHER AGENCY SUPPORT

The Sabah Foundation, a semi-government organization funded by timber concessions, has in the past generously supported various schemes intended, amongst other things, to help in the teaching of English. A Dutch body, The van Leer Foundation, also provides some help (see above).

11. COMMERCIAL OPPORTUNITIES

There is some demand for private English language classes, but whether this is already met by the existing schools is difficult to judge.

Opportunities for publishing seem limited, as the texts used in schools are largely restricted to those recommended by the Ministry.

12. CREATIVE WRITING

There are no agencies, projects or other means to promote creative writing in English.

13. CURRENT RESEARCH

Owing to economic stringencies, no new research is being undertaken in Sabah.

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15. GENERAL STATEMENT

The English language seems to be standing at something of a watershed in Sabah. Whilst it is frequently used in business, the use of Bahasa Malaysia in government, and now in education as the language of instruction, is likely to undermine the position of English. English language teaching itself seems to be in a similar critical position. It faces many problems and is generally held, for various reasons, in low esteem by the pupils. Problems are frequently exacerbated by isolation from any culture where the English language is used. In the schools themselves, old attitudes and expectations from the days when English was the language of instruction die hard. It has been said that 'there is growing realization by members of the Department Education and the Sabah State Government that the ELT situation is critical and that Sabah is likely to suffer in international dealings if the situation is allowed to get even worse. Whether anything practical will be done to stop, or even reverse, the trend does however remain to be seen' (Sabah ELT Profile 1978). This is still the case. On the more positive side, both State and Federal Government officers have been widely reported as stating that the development of the nation's second official language is both important and valuable.